8

Social Change and Social Identity: Postmodernity, Reflexive Modernisation and the Transformation of Social Identities in Australia

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Social identity is one of the central concerns of sociology in the new millennium. The most cursory overview of contemporary work across the discipline reveals the extent to which the concept currently assumes a dominant place in research and analysis. Social identity is crucial to the understanding of society advanced by leading theorists such as Bauman, Bourdieu and Giddens, which drives much of the research agendas of key areas of sociological concern such as age, class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationalism, and centrally informs thinking in disciplines that impact upon and interact closely with sociology such as psychology and cultural studies. The centrality of the social identity concept arguably reflects the analytic utility provided by various forms of the construct (e.g. individual identity, collective identity, identity politics, virtual identity), its close links with other key ideas in contemporary sociology (e.g. embodiment, difference, community, resistance) and its centrality within classical and contemporary sociological thought.

However, notwithstanding the recent explosion in the scope and prevalence of identity studies in sociology, there is a remarkable absence of corresponding empirical research. With the renewed focus upon social identities has come a growing body of work concerned with elaborating and refining theoretical foundations, and mapping out new areas for substantive applications (Jenkins 1996; Cerulo 1997; Craib 1998). However, much less common have been empirical studies exploring the measurement and social distribution

of social identities, or reporting personal accounts of how social identities are lived or felt by the individual across divergent social contexts.

Particular forms of social identity, such as class (Devine 1992a; Gamson 1992; Skeggs 1997; Western 1999) and nation (McCrone *et al.* 1998; Phillips 1998) have been the subjects of detailed empirical consideration. But we are unaware of more general empirical studies directed towards key questions from social theory about the future of modernity and its consequences for social identities in contemporary societies. The nature and fate of the social self in contemporary societies is a key issue of contention here. While there is a consensus that change of a significant type is occurring, there are different ways of thinking about this. Many sociologists believe that the modern age is coming to an end, and that we are in the process of moving into a new period where social and cultural life is modulated in fundamentally new and different ways. For some such as Baudrillard (1981), there has been an abrupt shift to a "postmodern culture". For others such as Giddens (1990), change has been more gradual, and we might in fact be seen as in the "late" phases of the modern age.

In this chapter, we address this question by empirically analysing continuity and change in patterns of social identification among Australians from the mid-1980s through to the late 1990s. Our objectives are threefold: to describe the relative salience of different sources of social identity in two discrete time periods and across three birth cohorts or generations; to examine period and generational differences in the strength of different social identities; and finally to assess whether identities are organised in some kind of stable system which is consistent with a coherent and unified self-concept. We begin by considering two alternative accounts of contemporary social change, postmodernisation and reflexive modernisation, and their implications for social identity. We next outline a brief theory of identity before turning to the empirical analyses.

Theories of post- and reflexive modernity

One of the reasons why identity is central to contemporary social thought and to public discourse is that rapid social change potentially produces a mismatch between social understandings and new social relations (Jenkins 1996) that problematises previously taken-for-granted identities. Two major approaches are especially relevant here: analyses of postmodernity associated with the work of Jameson (1991), Lyotard (1979) and Bauman (1992); and accounts of reflexive modernisation provided by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1990, 1991b).

Postmodernity is a highly contested term but analysts who use it typically suggest that contemporary societies are increasingly characterised by their fragmented, fissured and fractured nature. Patterns and regularities in social life have given way to flux and fluidity (Lyon 2000). For Bauman (1992) incoherence is the defining feature of postmodernity. Incoherence in society and social relationships is matched by incoherence in social narratives, with a multitude of incommensurable accounts possible, each of which has its own values, beliefs and legitimate truth criteria (Lyotard 1979, 1988). Dealing with the "postmodern condition" involves attempting to "make sense of our lives in a context of multiple, open-ended, ever proliferating narratives and language games" (Norris 2000: 29). For Crook *et al.* (1992), these processes can be summarised in two tendencies, hyper-differentiation in which spheres of social life become increasingly internally fragmented and diverse, and dedifferentiation in which boundaries between spheres progressively erode. The implication of these tendencies is that social structures of class, gender, age, ethnicity and the like break down, while subjective forms of expression associated with them are also increasingly fragmented and individualised (Crook *et al.* 1992).

With the collapse of social structures, consumption or, more particularly, consumerism comes to occupy the centre of identity formation in postmodernity (Lipovetsky 1994; McDonald 1999). The dissolution of social structures and the proliferation of acceptable social narratives ensure that society comes to be increasingly organised around individual choice and self-expression rather than structural principles of social organisation. Personal expression is manifested through individualised consumption as source of personal autonomy (Lipovetsky 1994). "Post modern individuals" thus have highly fluid and contextual identities and personalities that are entirely contingent, changeable at will and operating on the "surface" of the self (or more accurately selves) (Lipovetsky 1994; McDonald 1999). These identities are expressed through individual and idiosyncratic styles of consumerism. Social identity in postmodernity therefore exhibits a tendency away from substance and continuity towards instability, fragility, contingency and contextuality (Kellner 1992) and the links between identities and social structures are broken.

Analyses that understand the contemporary period in terms of reflexive modernisation also assert the fluidity and multiplicity of identities, but they retreat from more radical claims about the dissolution of social

structures and stable concepts of selfhood that characterise postmodern analyses. For Giddens (1991a) reflexive modernisation refers to the fact that all social practices are constantly subject to examination and potential revision. The certainty of scientific knowledge and tradition gives way to the realisation that social life must be underpinned by reflexively applied knowledge, but such knowledge is always unstable and changeable. Reflexivity thus attempts to provide a rational basis for social practice, while simultaneously undermining the possibility of rational certainty. The pervasive reflexivity of modern life undercuts the four central bases of trust in premodern societies, kinship relations, localised community relations, religious cosmologies and traditional authority (Giddens 1991a). In modernity, personal relationships of friendship and sexual intimacy replace kinship relations as a means of stabilising social ties across time and space. Localised communities with identities tied to place are undermined by globalising processes which link the local and global, and religion and tradition are overturned by reflexively organised knowledge based on abstract thought and systematic empirical observation (Giddens 1991a).

Reflexivity also permeates processes of identity formation. Within modernity, social identity becomes a reflexive project (Harre 1983; Giddens 1991a), as people exercise increasing choice over the identities that they want to matter to them and those that they do not. Just as new and appealing identities are able to be selected and lived-out, those forms of social identity which lose meaning and social significance are discarded. At the same time, however, identities are not as fluid, contingent and variable as postmodernism would argue. Individuals need to maintain "ontological security", that is confidence that their self-identity and surrounding conditions and circumstances have some ongoing durability and reliability (Giddens 1991a). For ontological security an individual's self-identity, as a collection of reflexively constructed personal and social identities, needs to be coherently organised, and there needs to be some predictability about the social relations and conditions of daily life which individuals encounter.

Postmodernisation and reflexive modernisation thus have similarities and differences in the way they theorise identity formation and processes in contemporary societies. Both accounts imply increasing "voluntarism" around identity processes and formation and the importance of multiple identities to self-identity. Both theories also imply that structurally based identities rooted in kinship and family relations, religion, class and work, and localised communities should be of declining significance.

Symptomatic of these developments have been debates about the decline of class as a principal feature of contemporary societies and the emergence of new social relationships linked to lifestyle patterns and individualised consumption (Beck 1992; Crook *et al.* 1992; Bradley 1996; Pakulski and Waters 1996). The decline of traditional institutions and forms of social organisation described by reflexive modernisation, and the hyperdifferentiation of postmodernisation both imply a declining significance of class, work and occupational identities.

The theories differ, however, in whether they conceive of multiple identities being coherently organised within individual subjectivities, and how they think about the socio-structural grounding of identities in contemporary societies. For postmodern theorists, identities are completely fluid, disconnected from social structures and picked up and discarded at will. Individuals have multiple selves based on multiple identities, which are not organised in any transcontextual stable hierarchy. There is no continuity of identity across time or space, for theorists of postmodernity. For theorists of reflexive modernisation, identities are reflexively constructed but coherently organised. The reflexive "self" is a coherent individual project that is not the same as the postmodern "selves" that comprise the "postmodern individual" (if that is not an oxymoron). It is also quite consistent with reflexive modernisation that new structurally rooted identities that have their origins in ascribed differences, race, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, and the like, emerge, while traditional identities rooted in work, family, religion and locality decline (Beck 1992; Jenkins 1996). Ascribed identities, because they are widely recognised and have clear markers around physical characteristics, language, dress, accent and style provide an experiential basis for social categorisation that is highly salient for identity formation (Jenkins 1996) under conditions of reflexive evaluation of all social practices. Within theories of postmodernity, however, hyperdifferentiation and individualised self-expression undermine the formation of perceptions of identity and difference according to such social categories.

Towards a theory of identity

The primary aim of this chapter is to document contemporary empirical trends in the salience of different social identities. Before this however, we provide a preliminary statement of our own theoretical position on identity in response to the arguments just outlined. In our view postmodern claims about identity are not sustainable for two major reasons.

From the point of view of ontological security, or from the point of view of maintaining a psychologically sustainable self-identity, it is insupportable to claim that identities are entirely contingent, changeable and have no transcontextual existence. Without some continuity of identity across time and space individuals cannot sustain sanity (Weigert *et al.* 1986) or function competently as knowledgeable actors across their daily lives. Contingent, fluid and ever-changing identities not only make it extremely difficult for individuals to be in the world, they make it virtually impossible for others to know how to deal with them.

Second, the postmodern view that identities are infinitely variable and subject only to individual choice does not appear sustainable. The highly individualised hyperdifferentiated identities endorsed by some theorists of postmodernisation are not materially or socially accessible to large sectors of the population, including the young, the unemployed, and the otherwise socially disadvantaged. There are real social, material and economic constraints on the capacity to express our identities through consumption and other means that are structured by relations of age, class, gender and ethnicity (Bradley 1996). In addition, it must be remembered that identities are enacted in social situations involving rules, norms, differential resources, and other actors. The successful enactment of an identity always depends on institutional features of the situation, prevailing social relations and the dramaturgical skills of performers within it (Weigert *et al.* 1986). Actors with more institutional power, advantaged social positions or greater skill may be able to impose identities on others, despite their preferences for alternatives. Garfinkel's (1956) analyses of degradation ceremonies in which negative identities such as "cheat", "traitor" or "adulterer" are forcefully imposed on people, regardless of their will, illustrate this latter process (Weigert *et al.* 1986).

These arguments imply that the voluntaristic and asocial conception of identity associated with postmodernism is incorrect. They also imply that opportunities for reflexively constructed identities are not equally distributed across the population. Individuals who are socially, economically and politically advantaged by relations of class, gender, age, ethnicity and so on may have more freedom to reflexively construct their identities without reference to others than individuals in subordinate social positions. These individuals may also actively and reflexively construct their identities, but will typically do so with respect to dominant social relations and groups (Skeggs 1997; McDonald 1999).

On this view, identity can usefully be defined as "a typified self at a stage in the life course situated in a context of organised social relationships" (Weigert *et al.* 1986: 53). A person's social identity is constructed in reference to social category systems (Frable 1997) and reflects their different social identifications. We follow Turner (1984: 527) in defining social identification as "the internalisation by an individual of socially significant social categories as aspects of his [*sic*] self-concept". In common with theorists of postmodernisation and reflexive modernisation we recognise that individuals have multiple social identities that are available to them, but these are socio-historically specific and hierarchically and coherently organised (Weigert *et al.* 1986). The socio-historical availability of identity should be obvious to sociologists – there are many fewer Althusserians in sociology departments than there once were, and perhaps even fewer positivists.

In complex and differentiated societies people necessarily have multiple identities. These are hierarchically arranged in terms of their importance to the self, and must also adapt to the importance expected by others. Such identities must also be flexible to accommodate changing situational requirements (Weigert *et al.* 1986), but they must be coherent enough and durable enough across situations to preserve ontological security and psychological well-being. In routine social situations, organising identities is unproblematic, and knowledgeability entails being able to present a single appropriate identity in a taken-for-granted way with confidence that it will be accepted, understood and appropriately responded to.

In times of rapid social change, however, and at certain critical points in the lifecourse, the need to organise and reorganise multiple identities becomes overt (Weigert *et al.* 1986). The birth of a child, for instance, frequently brings about a reorganisation and re-prioritisation of identities for both women and men. Other significant life-events, marriage, divorce, retirement, major illness may similarly reconfigure identities. Contemporary changes associated with increasing social differentiation, rising social and geographic mobility, educational expansion and changing social and cultural norms may also bring about changes to the organisation of social identities. The empirical processes identified by theorists of postmodernisation and reflexive modernisation undoubtedly have implications for identity formation even if we disagree about what these implications might be.

Although we are unaware of systematic empirical evidence about how social identities are changing in contemporary societies, some existing

empirical research on related issues provides indirect evidence that such changes may be occurring. First, public opinion research tends to suggest that in a range of societies, socio-structural factors are of declining importance in shaping opinions, attitudes and beliefs (Studlar and Welch 1981; McAllister 1994). Secondly, in Australia, and elsewhere, researchers suggest that class is of declining significance as a determinant of voting behaviour and electoral choice (Kemp 1978; Aitkin 1982; McAllister 1994; Weakliem and Western 1999). Both these sets of findings have implications for changing patterns of social identification, because the theories that underwrite these research traditions essentially assume that the manner in which class and other aspects of social structure influence attitudes and behaviour is through identity formation or "social group loyalties" (McAllister 1994: 87). For the social structure to influence public opinion and electoral choice individuals need to feel loyalty to, that is identify with, the social categories implied by their socio-structural locations. If the impact of social structural factors on public opinion and electoral choice is either declining or variable over time, it suggests that socio-structural identities are themselves either declining in salience, or that the relative salience of different sources of identification is variable. There has not been much research on the first of these issues, but recent research in Australia and elsewhere examines the relative salience of a variety of class and non-class identities (Marshall *et al.* 1988; Emmison and Western 1990; Devine 1992b), with mixed results.

In addition to this research, many cross-national, longitudinal studies provide reasonably clear evidence of values changing in a postmodern direction over time. Most obvious here is the work of Inglehart (1997). Based on cross-national survey evidence collected between 1970 and the mid-1990s in 43 countries, Inglehart argues for a broad shift from modern to postmodern orientations in advanced industrial societies. The most well-known aspect of Inglehart's wide-ranging research programme has concerned the gradual movement from materialist to postmaterialist values. Amongst the strongest evidence for this change has been the shift amongst general publics across Western societies from economic and physical security to self-expression and quality of life as their country's highest priorities. Most recently Inglehart and Baker (2000) have asserted and found evidence that traditional values emphasising religion and traditional authority have (partially) given way in the industrialised societies to secular/rational values emphasising rationality and abstract knowledge. The findings are consistent with Giddens's (1991a) arguments about reflexive modernisation and

detraditionalisation. Similarly, the results of Halman's (1995) cross-national study of changes over time in moral orientations are consistent with arguments about the diminished role of religion and tradition and the increased importance of individualism and voluntaristic choice in the construction of human action. Using attitudinal data collected in 1981 and 1990 from a cross-national survey of 15 Western and Eastern European countries, Halman found strong evidence for a decline in civic virtues (e.g. living a claiming state benefits illegally, cheating on taxes) and an increase in permissiveness (e.g. married men/women having an affair, homosexuality).

This empirical research highlights the importance of taking a "generational approach" (Whittier 1997) to the study of value change. Following Mannheim (1996), researchers argue that generational differences in the formative experiences of members of different age cohorts shape these members' orientations and value preferences. Generations have distinctive cultures and traditions arising from shared experiences and collective memory (Turner 1999). Inglehart, for instance, attributes generational differences in values associated with younger people's greater tendency to prioritise postmaterialist goals to their formative experiences of material affluence, and physical security, both of which free them from the need to worry about materialist concerns, and enable them to valorise postmaterialist goals of affection, esteem and self-actualisation.

Generational explanations also have implications for identity formation in post- and reflexive modernity. Turner (1999) argues that postmodernisation may lead to greater fluidity in generational identities, implying greater fragmentation of the identities that members of different generations hold. Conversely, economic changes associated with postmodernity, such as persistent youth unemployment may entrench material differences between older more affluent generations, and younger more disadvantaged ones. The political and economic dominance of more affluent generations enables them to monopolise cultural icons and promotes the formation of separate generational identities based on cultural dominance and cultural resistance. This is manifested in generational distinctions around popular music, fashion, "style" more generally, art, literature and politics (Turner 1999). In Australia, Davis (1997) has argued that such generational differences in identity are reflected in the way an ageing baby boomer elite dominates the mass media and other means of cultural and intellectual production and marginalises and disparages aspects of contemporary youth culture and politics.

The theoretical arguments and empirical studies mentioned here suggest several broad expectations about changing patterns and processes of social identification. First almost all this literature suggests that class and work-based identities are less important than they once were. Persistent long-term unemployment excludes large numbers of people from paid work and casualised and precarious employment regimes, coupled with international trends to deunionisation problematise the organisation of collectivist work and class-based identities (Beck 1992; Pakulski and Waters 1996). Second theories associated with new politics and new social movements suggest that non-class bases of identity organised around gender, nation, ethnicity, and so on are increasingly significant (Beck 1992). Alternatively, there are some grounds for thinking that collectivist identity sources in general will be of little salience, as people base their identities in highly individualised lifestyles and modes of consumption. Finally we might expect these processes to accelerate over time and to be more evident among younger cohorts than older ones, whose identity hierarchies were organised according to earlier social and institutional frameworks.

Research methods and analytic strategy

The theoretical and empirical literature suggests some ways in which social identities respond to social change. However, as already noted, much of the evidence is indirect. To provide direct evidence on these issues we focus on three specific research questions. Is the relative salience of different sources of identity changing over time? Does it vary by "generation" or birth cohort? Does the articulation of different identities vary over time and by generation? To investigate these questions, we use data provided by two national sample surveys conducted 12 years apart, to analyse change in the social identifications of Australians that occurred from 1986 to 1998. The first of these surveys is the 1986 Class Structure of Australia Survey, which is the Australian component of the Comparative Project on Class Structure and Class Consciousness, directed by Erik Olin Wright. The second is the 1998 Australian Election Survey, a survey of electors, timed to closely follow a Federal election, and similar to the British Election studies. The Class Structure of Australia Survey was interviewer administered with a multi-stage cluster-sampling design. The Election Survey was a postal survey based on a stratified systematic sample drawn from the Commonwealth Electoral Roll. There are minor differences between the samples in terms of age and gender. Forty four per cent of the 1986 sample is female

compared to 50 per cent of the 1998 sample and the average age of respondents in the 1986 sample is 36, while in 1998 it is 47. On birthplace, however, the two samples are virtually identical. In 1986, 60 per cent of respondents were born in Australia of parents who were also Australian born. In 1998 the corresponding figure is 59 per cent. In 1986 and in 1998, 25 per cent of respondents were born overseas. The remaining 16 per cent or so on both samples are Australian born respondents with at least one overseas born parent.

Each survey contains 14 or 15 Likert style items measuring the salience of different sources of social identification. Broadly speaking respondents are asked to indicate how important various provided identity sources, such as class, gender and ethnicity, are to them. In this analysis we focus on 10 sources of identification that are common across both surveys. It is important to emphasise that we are focusing on social identification with a range of possible social categories, rather than on the broader aspects of the identities associated with these categories. Identities, broadly conceived, involve labels, names and categories through which people address others and themselves. They entail typified ways of speaking, thinking and acting, and they originate in socially constructed, institutionalised meanings (Weigert *et al.* 1986). We focus on only a very limited aspect of social identity, the distinct identification with a social category, but to our knowledge, this is the first time that trend data have been presented on even this issue.[1]

For most of the analysis we investigate trends in the patterning of identification by sample and by three birth cohorts or "generations". These cohorts are defined with reference to the baby boom generation. The baby boom cohort consists of those born between 1946 and 1960 (aged between 26 and 40 in 1986 and 38 and 52 in 1998). The pre-baby boom cohort consists of those born before 1946, while the post-baby boom cohort consists of those born after 1960. The baby boom generation is clearly recognised as a "watershed generation" experiencing the affluence of the post-war long boom and comparatively high levels of physical security. Inglehart, for instance, identifies this group as distinctive in the acquisition of postmaterialist values. In Australia, as already noted, the baby boom generation is also identified as an elite cultural grouping that dominates cultural production and maligns the cultural and political practices of subsequent generations (Davis 1997).

The analytic strategy for the chapter is simple. We begin by using simple descriptive statistics to examine the salience of the 10 different identity sources by cohort and by sample. Next we systematically examine cohort and over time differences in the strength of identification using

logistic regression. Finally we examine sample and cohort differences in the way people combine these identity sources using principal components analysis.

Changing patterns of social identification

Table 8.1 presents data relating to the salience or popularity of different identity sources by cohort, sample, and for the combined data set. For simplicity the identity responses have been dichotomised into identifiers and non-identifiers, and the table shows the percentage of people identifying with each source.[2] As can be seen the identity items comprise a range of socio-structural categories (class, gender, ethnicity and religion), territorial/locational identities linked to nation, place and region (Australian, state, town, sports team), and public sphere identities associated with work and politics. These are all "modernist" identities linked to social categories, rather than postmodern ones reflecting the highly differentiated individualised lifestyles and consumption patterns that some theorists argue characterise postmodern identity formation. Nonetheless, as we have already seen, theorists of reflexive modernisation and postmodernisation anticipate that formerly central modernist identities to do with class, work, family, religion and local community have either declined or been replaced by others, such as gender, age and ethnicity.

Table 8.1 shows remarkable consistency in the rankings or relative salience of the identity sources across cohorts and samples. The nation is clearly the most popular source of identification with at least 80 per cent of respondents in all cohorts identifying with being an Australian and 76 per cent of respondents in 1986, and 87 per cent of respondents in 1998 identifying this way.[3] In contrast to theorists such as Offe (1985) or Beck (1992) who argue that work no longer has the centrality for identity that it once did, over three quarters of all cohorts indicate their occupation is an important basis of identification. The percentage of respondents identifying on the basis of occupation has actually increased over the 12-year period from 1986 to 1998.

Turning to the remaining identity sources there is hardly any cohort variation in their relative popularity. The salience rankings across all 10 sources are virtually identical for the two younger cohorts, with gender being the most salient structural basis of identification, and the popularity of the territorial identity sources for town and state complementing the popularity of the nation as an identity source. Ethnicity, class and religion are all comparatively weak bases of identification, with fewer than half the respondents in each cohort identifying with them.

Table 8.1 Popularity of different sources of identification across three birth cohorts in 1986 and 1998

Pre-baby boom cohort		Baby boom cohort		Post-baby boom cohort		1986		1998		Combined	
Australian	86	Australian	80	Australian	80	Australian	76	Australian	87	Australian	83
Job	76	Job	78	Job	80	Job	72	Job	82	Job	78
State	64	Gender	56	Gender	60	Gender	54	Town	69	Town	57
Town	63	Town	52	Town	54	Ethnicity	51	State	62	Gender	56
Gender	54	State	51	State	52	State	46	Gender	54	State	56
Ethnicity	54	Ethnicity	44	Ethnicity	49	Town	40	Ethnicity	47	Ethnicity	47
Religion	48	Social class	37	Social class	45	Religion	36	Political party	45	Religion	40
Political party	46	Religion	34	Religion	37	Sports team	33	Social class	44	Social class	39
Social class	37	Political party	33	Sports team	33	Social class	32	Religion	42	Political party	36
Sports team	32	Sports team	28	Political party	27	Political party	23	Sports team	30	Sports team	31

One relevant cohort variation in Table 8.1 is that the relative popularity of gender is higher in the baby boom and post-baby boom cohorts than in the pre-baby boom cohort. However, this principally occurs because the number of baby boomers and post-baby boomers identifying on the basis of state and town is less than the number of state and town identifiers in the pre-baby boom cohort. Place-based identities are particularly strong amongst the oldest cohort and this relegates gender further down the identity hierarchy. The objective level of gender identification does not change substantially over the three cohorts.

In terms of over time change, the main difference between 1986 and 1998 is that there seems a stronger tendency in 1998 to identify with almost all bases of identity, with the exception of gender and ethnicity. This process largely explains the drop in salience of these two identity sources in 1998.

The final column of Table 8.1 presents overall rankings of the different identity sources. This gives us an "identity hierarchy" for the entire pooled sample. What is significant about this is how strongly traditional modernist identities associated with the nation, and with work, are ranked. Over three quarters of respondents perceive these to be salient, with other place-based identities and gender also being important. This evidence undermines postmodern and reflexive modernisation claims about the declining significance of traditional work-based and community-based identities (Offe 1985; Giddens 1991b; Beck 1992), but does provide some support for claims about the re-emergence of new structural sources of identity, such as gender, and the declining significance of class (Beck 1992; Pakulski and Waters 1996). The consistency of rankings across years and cohorts also undermines postmodern claims about the contextuality and fluidity of contemporary identities and gives more credibility to the view that identities are stably hierarchically organised.

To test sample and cohort differences in identification more systematically, Table 8.2 presents the results of logistic regression analyses regressing each identity measure on variables for time and cohort. We first tested for sample and cohort interactions, implying that cohort differences are not the same across samples. If the interaction between sample and cohort was not statistically significant for a given identity we then examined the additive effects of sample and cohort. The table summarises the results of these analyses presenting predicted probabilities from the appropriate (additive or interactive) logistic model.[4]

The logistic regression analyses indicated that the only identity sources for which cohort differences themselves varied in 1986 and

Table 8.2 Predicted probabilities of identifying with different identities by time and by cohort

Identity source	1986			1998		
	Pre-baby boom	Baby boom	Post-baby boom	Pre-baby boom	Baby boom	Post-baby boom
Australia	0.81	0.72	0.77	0.90	0.88	0.82
State	0.55	0.43	0.41	0.70	0.59	0.57
Town	0.46	0.37	0.34	0.74	0.66	0.63
Job	0.74	0.72	0.68	0.77	0.83	0.85
Gender	0.57	0.59	0.63	0.52	0.54	0.58
Ethnicity	0.56	0.46	0.52	0.52	0.42	0.48
Class	0.30	0.31	0.36	0.41	0.42	0.49
Religion	0.45	0.32	0.34	0.50	0.36	0.39
Political party	0.28	0.24	0.12	0.57	0.41	0.35
Sports team	0.31	0.31	0.42	0.33	0.25	0.28

1998 were Australian, job, political party and sports team. For all other identities cohort differences in identification did not vary over time.

Beginning with Australian we can see that in 1986 over 80 per cent of members of the pre-baby boom generation identified with the nation while only 72 per cent of the baby boom generation did. The regression results imply that this is the only significant difference in 1986. In 1998, however, both the pre-baby boom generation and baby boomers were more likely than the youngest cohort to identify with Australia, although levels of identification among all three cohorts are very high. For the other two territorial identities, generational differences are constant over time, and show the same pattern for each identity. Members of the oldest cohort are significantly more likely than either baby boomers or the post-baby boom generation to identify with their state and town. In addition, identification with these regional sources is stronger in 1998 than in 1986 as was also suggested in the previous table. Together the results suggest that national and regional identities are more salient among older cohorts than younger cohorts, regardless of time period.

Turning now to the status-based identities, gender, ethnicity, class and religion we again find some systematic differences. In both 1986 and 1998, members of the youngest cohort are more likely to identify on the basis of gender, than members of the oldest cohort are. Members of the youngest cohort are also more likely to claim a class identity than members of the other two cohorts, while members of both the oldest and youngest cohorts are more likely to identify on the basis of ethnicity

than baby boomers are. Finally, members of the oldest cohort are also distinctive in identifying on the basis of religion, being more likely to identify than individuals in either of the other two cohorts. Overall, with respect to the status-based identities, the youngest cohort is distinctive in its class identification, the oldest cohort in its religious identification, and the baby boomers by the weakness of their ethnic identification.

The fact that younger cohort members are identifying more with structural sources of identity such as gender and class undermines generational arguments that the postmodern decoupling of identities and social structures will be more common among the young. Certain traditional identities, most notably religion, prevail among the oldest cohort, but others do not. The finding with respect to gender is much more consistent with our arguments about the socio-historical availability of identities, than a more general postmodern claim about the erosion of socio-structural sources of identity. Feminism sensitises both women and men to gender, with the effect that gender identification is strongest among the young and least among the aged, with the baby boom cohort occupying a middle position. The finding with respect to class is also noteworthy, since the death of class thesis probably also implies that class is least salient as a basis of identification among the young. Young people have the weakest connections to institutions (trade unions, political parties, full-time employment) that might ostensibly promote a class identity and yet class identification is highest in the youngest cohort.

In terms of over time change in the socio-structural identities, there is no consistent trend in the data. Gender and ethnic identification declined over the period, but class and religious identification increased. These trends contradict postmodern expectations about the declining significance of core modernist identities associated with class and religion. They also contradict Giddens's (1991b) arguments about reflexive modernity and the disappearance of core bases of trust located in religion and tradition.

The remaining two identities, political party and sports team both exhibit interactions between sample and cohort. In 1986 members of the youngest cohort identified less with a political party than members of either older cohort. In 1998, both the baby boomers and the post-baby boomers are less likely to identify with a political party than members of the oldest cohort are. However, levels of party identification are higher in 1998 than in 1986 in all three cohorts, a finding which contradicts some previous research showing declining partisanship in

Australia over time (McAllister 1994: 41). One relevant issue here is the change in the party system between 1986 and 1998. Australian politics in 1998 was arguably more diverse than in 1986 with a wider range of minor parties (Democrats, Greens, One Nation) existing in addition to the major ones. Increased choice may be associated with higher levels of party identification as previously disenchanted electors are drawn to new parties. Party identification may also be stronger immediately after an election campaign (as was the case with the 1998 survey), than in the period between elections (1986).

Finally, in 1986 members of the youngest cohort were significantly more likely to identify with a sports team than members of the other two cohorts. However, by 1998, the only cohort difference occurs between the two older cohorts, with the pre-baby boom generation more likely to identify with their sports team than baby boomers.

The evidence to this point indicates that levels of identification with place-based and status-based socio-structural identities are comparatively high and relatively stable over time and cohort. This does not suggest that either postmodern or reflexively modern societies have distinctively new forms and processes of social identity. To conclude the empirical analysis, we next examine the ways different identity sources are structured or interlinked. Do people who believe that class is an important basis of identification also believe than gender is important, for instance, and do people who reject class also reject gender? If identities are completely fluid and contextual, survey responses will be essentially random, and there will be no coherent structure in the way identities are articulated. On the other hand, if identities are systematically organised we should find clear patterns or "structures" in the empirical associations between different identity sources. We investigate this issue in Tables 8.3 and 8.4, using principal components analysis to see if the identity sources are empirically associated in ways that make theoretical sense. In Table 8.3 we carry out the principal components analysis separately by year. In Table 8.4 we present similar analyses by cohort.

Table 8.3 shows that in 1986 the identity measures fall on two largely interpretable factors, and one weaker, and less interpretable one. In 1986, identities could quite clearly be grouped into a territorial dimension, geographically bounded, and consisting of multiple overlapping "imagined communities". This dimension comprises state, Australian, town and sports team. The second dimension comprises socio-structural or positional based identities, class, gender and ethnicity. The third dimension comprising religion and political party does not represent

Table 8.3 Principal components analysis of identity sources by year

1986	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	1998	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
State	**82**	8	16	State	**79**	20	19
Australian	**73**	1	6	Australian	**72**	–1	9
Town	**69**	13	16	Party	**69**	29	8
Sports team	**42**	17	–13	Team	**46**	33	16
Class	2	**72**	13	Religion	16	**78**	4
Gender	7	**65**	–12	Gender	10	**75**	12
Ethnicity	18	**60**	14	Ethnicity	20	**69**	30
Job	25	**29**	23	Job	5	10	**85**
Religion	6	2	**78**	Class	20	29	**68**
Political party	5	9	**67**	Town	**53**	6	**62**
Total variance explained	19.5	14.5	12.3		22.3	19.8	17.5

Note: Component loadings are multiplied by 100 and rounded to nearest integer. Loadings greater than 0.40 are shown in bold.

a strong association in the data, however these two identity sources represent, in particular ways, potential sites of core beliefs and values. As Bean's (1999) work has shown, there have historically been strong connections between religion and electoral politics in Australia, with religious divisions a significant source of political behaviour.

In 1998 we again see indications of the territorial based dimension (state, Australian, town and team), although it is less coherent than in 1986. Political party now also loads on this dimension, and the town-based identity loads strongly on both the first and third factors. The second factor, comprising religion, gender and ethnicity is a status-based or socio-structural dimension, similar to that found in 1986, but the third weak factor, comprising occupation, class and town is not found in 1986. This last dimension combines key factors of class-based identity rooted in an occupational community, where the coincidence of work, class and residence combine to lead to the formation of solidaristic class identities (Blauner 1964; Lockwood 1966), but such occupational communities are increasingly rare in globalised economies. In any event, the basic finding of the over time analyses is that the territorial and status dimensions to social identity persevere over the time period, but that these dimensions are slightly less coherently structured in 1998 than they were in 1986.

Table 8.4 Principal components analysis of identity sources by cohort

Pre-baby boom	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Baby boom	Factor 1	Factor 2	Post-baby boom	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
State	**78**	9	22	State	**79**	20	State	**79**	21	–2
Australian	**73**	–1	6	Australian	**78**	–7	Australian	**71**	2	5
Political party	**62**	33	–4	Town	**70**	21	Town	**62**	19	38
Town	**57**	–3	**56**	Party	**42**	37	Party	**58**	11	27
Team	**46**	21	12	Job	**40**	37	Team	**46**	**43**	–44
Gender	5	**75**	8	Sports team	33	30	Ethnicity	16	**73**	2
Religion	21	**66**	–1	Ethnicity	18	**70**	Religion	11	**69**	18
Ethnicity	9	**63**	30	Gender	4	**62**	Gender	3	**65**	3
Job	5	5	**83**	Class	**26**	**59**	Class	**26**	**45**	**40**
Class	17	28	**63**	Religion	7	**59**	Job	20	15	**80**
Total variance explained	21.5	16.4	15.6	Total variance explained	31.5	11.5	Total variance explained	22.2	19.3	12.4

Note: Component loadings are multiplied by 100 and rounded to nearest integer. Loadings greater than 0.40 are shown in bold.

In Table 8.4 we investigate the articulation of identity sources by cohort. The oldest cohort shows three reasonably clear dimensions – a territorial dimension, this time including political party along with state, Australia, town and sporting team; the status-based or socio-structural dimension comprising gendered, religious and ethnic identifications, and the class and work-based identity identified previously. Among baby boomers, the identity items load only on two dimensions one comprising the territorial sources (Australia, state and town), but including party and job; and the other representing a clear socio-structural dimension (ethnicity, gender, class religion). Political party and job load weakly on both factors.

The youngest cohort also illustrates territorial (state, Australia, town, sporting team) and status-based identities (Ethnicity, Gender, Religion, Class), but these are somewhat more fragmented in that the sports team-based identity loads moderately strongly on all three factors. There is also a comparatively clear articulation of class and job – two central modernist identity sources in the youngest cohort, although class is also associated with the second socio-structural factor. This positional dimension of social identity is also clearly defined in the youngest cohort, which we would not anticipate according to postmodern arguments about the highly individualised fluidity of identity formation processes among postmodern individuals.

Discussion and conclusions

This evidence suggests that territorial and positional identities are still salient over time and by generational grouping. The territorial identities are arguably more important than the socio-structural ones for most people, but certain socio-structural identities, notably gender (especially for the youngest cohort), and religion for the older cohort remain highly important components of the self. Respondents see their gender and their religion as being important qualities that distinctively shape "who they are". Class, paradoxically, is a more important source of identity for the youngest cohort than for the older cohorts. In addition, the relative salience of identity sources is remarkably consistent over time and by cohort, as is their articulation, as revealed by the principal components analysis.

These findings suggest that there is more commonality and consistency about levels and patterns of social identification than postmodern theory suggests. We found little evidence of an absence of structure in the way identities are articulated, no evidence that work as source of

identity is unimportant (indeed quite the contrary – almost 80 per cent of all respondents saw their job as an important source of identification), and some evidence that class and religion are only important identity sources for less than half the population. Although this is only preliminary research into social identification, and we do not address deeper issues about the meaning of such identifications, Australia does not appear to exhibit the kind of postmodern identity flux that theorists such as Lipovetsky (1994), Bauman (1992) or Lyotard (1979) emphasise. The evidence highlights consistency and continuity of identities among different groups, over time, and within individuals, rather than instability and discontinuity as postmodern accounts predict. There is also mixed support for theorists of reflexive modernisation. Class and religion are not salient sources of identity for many people, supporting the claims of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991b) that these earlier modernist identities have declined in significance. However, place-based identities, which link ideologically to notions of community, are highly salient. This finding applies both to the nation, as an imagined community, and to localised places such as states and towns. Moreover, there is only limited evidence that socio-structural identities in general are unimportant sources of identification. The weakest structural bases of identity, class and religion, are still claimed by about 40 per cent of respondents.

The evidence with respect to salience and patterning therefore does not suggest that the contemporary period is one in which social identity processes are distinctively different from earlier times. But this research admittedly addresses change over time in identity processes in a limited way. What is missing is a detailed investigation of the meanings associated with the different sources of identity. Social identities are "social", they entail and construct perceptions of similarity and difference and inclusion and exclusion (Jenkins 1996; Weigert *et al.* 1986). They also have important affective components that involve emotions and feelings, such as warmth, disdain and disgust (Weigert *et al.* 1986). Important changes in the meanings associated with social identities could be occurring, even when the hierarchical ordering of identities appears stable. In addition, consistency across groups in the salience of identities does not necessarily indicate consistency across groups in the meanings associated with those identities.

Identification with Australia provides a case in point. Previous research into the symbolic dimensions of the Australian national community suggests that the boundaries defining what it means to be "Australian" can be conceptualised in terms of internal and external friends and enemies (Phillips 1996). Such boundaries identify "insiders"

who are part of the symbolic community of Australia and "outsiders" who are not. The 1998 Australian Federal election was distinctive for the presence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, which attempted to mobilise a national rhetoric based on populist conceptions of insiders and outsiders. "Insiders" in this rhetoric included "ordinary" Australians, "battlers" and Anglo-Australians (Ward *et al.* 2000), while outsiders included elites of various kinds, especially political elites (i.e. the established parties), members of certain ethnic communities, welfare recipients, Aborigines, academics and the mass media (Ward *et al.* 2000). The One Nation Party had little success at the 1998 poll (although elements of their highly exclusive conception of the national community have arguably since been adopted by the major political parties). Yet, the presence of One Nation in the 1998 election can be seen to reflect the extent to which the identities of Australia and Australian are contested. While our evidence suggested that national identification was widespread in 1998 following the election, the electorate was clearly divided about what such identification meant. Such dissensus in popular conceptions of the nation was also strongly evident during the Australian constitutional referendum in the following year (Charnock 2001).

This argument suggests that the research agenda for identity in the contemporary period needs to move in several directions. First, cross-national studies need to extend this research, by further investigating issues relating to the salience and structuring of modernist identities associated with place and social structures. Without cross-national research into the salience and structuring of social identities we do not know how general our findings are. Perhaps Australia is distinctive in the extent to which modernist identities hold sway. Second, postmodern identity forms rooted in consumerism and individual self-expression also need to be systematically examined. One of the characteristics of the postmodern individual may be the ability to switch back and forth between modern and postmodern identities, largely at will. We may have tapped into the modernist elements of the "postmodern self" in this research by concentrating on modernist identity sources. Alternatively, one element of the "postmodern individual" may be a capacity to hold and present modernist identifications alongside postmodern ones. In subsequent research we intend following this issue further. Finally, research needs to address seriously the meanings of social identities, the extent to which such meanings are contested, and the social structuring and implications of those identities. Deeply contested identities are also likely to be highly salient to the actors concerned,

and to be significant causes of social and political action. Contested identities provide a basis for political mobilisation and action at local, regional, national and supranational levels, as recent debates in Australia around national identity and events since September 11, 2001, indicate. We cannot infer similarity in the content and meaning of social identities from broad similarities in the ordering of identity hierarchies and the articulation of the social identities that comprise them.

Notes

1. It is also important to emphasise that we focus primarily on "modernist" identity sources linked to social categories and groupings rather than more individualistic "postmodern" ones. We have information about postmodern identifications in the 1998s data, which are the subject of another paper, but no comparable data in 1986. Since this chapter is primarily concerned with examining trends and generational differences in identities we limit our analysis to sources of identification that are common to both datasets.
2. This can be thought of as the average probability that an individual will claim this identity. The ranking of identities in terms of probabilities thus bears directly on issues of their relative "salience".
3. One sampling issue is relevant here. The 1986 survey used an area-based sample, while the 1998 survey uses the Commonwealth Electoral Roll as a sampling frame. The electoral roll is confined to Australian citizens and Commonwealth citizens who were enrolled to vote in Australia in 1984. The citizenship requirement partly explains the stronger identification with Australia in 1998.
4. When we fit the interactive model, the predicted probability of identifying simply equals the observed probability. However, the regression analysis also gives us statistical tests of the regression coefficients that translate (roughly) into tests of differences between cohorts in the probability of identifying.